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ABSTRACT

The impact that voluntary or compulsory enrollment has on the community college student in compensatory education programs needs to be studied. Few, if any, studies have focused specifically on the relationship of volunteer status and the effects of the compensatory programs. The question of whether nonvolunteers can be coerced to enroll in compensatory programs and benefit from them remains largely unanswered. (A list of 44 references if provided.) (DB)

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VOLUNTARY OR COMPULSORY ENROLLMENT IN COMPENSATORY EDUCATION PROGRAMS: A PRACTICAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUE

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An interpretive review of the literature is used to stress the importance of examining our enrollment practices with regard to compensatory education programs. The need for substantive research, focusing on the volunteer variable, is emphasized.

The substantial number of high risk students enrolled at most community colleges mandates compensatory education programs as one of the important offerings of the two-year college. Considerable evidence exists that special programs, in fact, are being provided by the colleges; however, there are data which indicate, while some institutions require enrollment in compensatory programs, many merely prescribe or recommend enrollment (Ferrin, 1971). Students in need of compensatory programs often do not enroll in them when schools offer such programs on a voluntary basis. In other words, a large number of students may be in need of special programs or services but only the volunteers obtain them because they recognize or admit to deficiencies and seek help; students in need of services who do not seek help, the nonvolunteers, are not reached.

Some educators are concerned about the nonvolunteers who do not receive the requisite skills and services they may need to succeed (Spielberger and Weitz, 1964); however, debate exists regarding whether or not students should be coerced into services. Proponents of required enrollment tend to minimize the importance of willingness to take compensatory work as a factor related to the outcome of the program; they assume a nonvolunteer

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who is compelled to enroll would benefit as much as a volunteer. Thus, educators such as Nelson (1963) believe high risk community college students should be forced into participation through scholarship rules or registration mechanics. On the other hand, advocates of voluntary participation emphasize the importance of motivation to take compensatory work; hence, they would be reluctant to coerce unwilling students to enroll by making the program a requirement.

The opinions alluded to above are conjectural because substantive research to support either position is sparse. In fact, the volunteer variable has been virtually ignored by educational researchers. Such an omission could be serious because there is a plethora of research evidence, from studies outside the field of education, which indicates that we must attend to the effects volunteer status may have on the achievement of students in compensatory education programs.

THE VOLUNTEER VARIABLE IN RESEARCH

A brief review of the literature is in order to demonstrate that there is need for attending to the volunteer variable. Rosenthal and Rosnow (1969) have questioned the practice of coercion based on theoretical considerations and on some research evidence. They assert volunteer status may interact with experimental variables to influence the outcome of experiments. In other words, they hypothesize that requiring nonvolunteers to participate affects the subjects' subsequent task performances because the subjects are poorly motivated to perform tasks against their will. Such a position is supported by studies (Brower, 1948; Rosnow and Rosenthal, 1966; and Rosenthal and Rosnow, 1969) which report volunteer status affected subsequent research data, i.e., volunteers and nonvolunteers performed the

tasks in the experimental situations differently. If a differential effect is observed in experimental contexts, is it unreasonable to assume it could exist in an educational setting?

THE ACT OF VOLUNTEERING

When we generalize additional information from a variety of studies it becomes obvious that the act of volunteering should be of concern to educators. A large body of evidence indicates volunteering is a nonrandom event, i.e., the act of volunteering is determined by the set of circumstances which exists in the recruitment or solicitation process. Volunteering is a function of the task for which participants are sought, the manner in which they are solicited, and how the recruitment variables interact with the specific personal characteristics of the persons who are being recruited. It is clear, then, that volunteering does not occur by chance, rather it is determined by an interaction of situational factors and the personal attributes of the potential volunteers or nonvolunteers to whom the appeal is made (Gaudet and Wilson, 1940; Suchman and McCandless, 1940; Reuss, 1943; Edgerton, Britt, and Norman, 1947; Norman, 1948; Lasagna and von Felsinger, 1954; Blake, Berkowitz, Bellamy, and Mouton, 1956; Himelstein, 1956; Rosenbaum, 1956; Martin and Marcuse, 1958; Belson, 1960; Capra and Dittes, 1961, 1962; Ward, 1965; Rose and Elton, 1968).

Of course it is likely that we would find volunteering for educational programs also constitutes purposeful behavior. Variations in recruitment techniques, recruitment strategies, or recruiting personnel, in all likelihood would result in differing rates of volunteering for educational programs.

CHARACTERISTICS OF VOLUNTEERS AND NONVOLUNTEERS

Research from a variety of studies clearly indicates that volunteers differ from nonvolunteers on numerous educational, demographic and personality indices. However, attempts to ascertain enduring or stable characteristics that differentiate between the two groups have been unsuccessful. Hence, because the differences vary from one context to another, one must conclude that the differences also appear to be a function of the tasks for which the volunteers are solicited and the method used for recruitment (Gaudet and Wilson, 1940; Suchman and McCandless, 1940; Reuss, 1943; Edgerton, Britt, and Norman, 1947; Wallin, 1949; Rosen, 1951; Kruglov and Davidson, 1953; Newman, 1956; Belson, 1960; Lubin, Levitt, and Zucherman, 1962; Robins, 1963; McDavid, 1965). Given such evidence, it is logical to conclude that differences between volunteers and nonvolunteers also will exist in educational contexts.

It is not necessary to rely solely on logic, however, because several studies comparing characteristics of volunteers and nonvolunteers for educational services have found that students volunteered for educational services because they recognized or admitted to problems and wanted to modify self-perceived educational, personal or social deficiencies. Nonvolunteers did not report such self-perceived deficiencies (Robinson, 1950; Daleys, 1964; Foxe, 1967; Minge and Bowman, 1967; Olch and Snow, 1970). Although we are aware that such differences exist between volunteers and nonvolunteers, we still are uninformed regarding how such differences might interact to affect their performances in compensatory programs.

To summarize, much research evidence suggests that we should concern ourselves with the volunteer variable in educational practices. It is

important to know how to effectively introduce students to services they need. More importantly, it is necessary to know what impact voluntary or compulsory enrollment has on the student. Do students who are coerced into compensatory programs profit from their enrollment? What happens to the nonvolunteers, those students who refuse to participate? What becomes of the volunteers who are denied enrollment because, for one reason or another, they cannot be accomodated?

VOLUNTEERING FOR COMPENSATORY PROGRAMS

The above questions are part of a larger research issue. The paucity of educational research which examines the volunteer variable is a serious oversight because many studies which have set out to test the efficacy of compensatory programs can be seriously criticized on methodological grounds due to their failure to equate the experimental and control groups on their initial motivation to enroll in the compensatory programs, as Entwisle (1960) and Reed (1956) have pointed out. A frequent criticism of the past research has been that investigators failed to take into account the volunteer status of the samples being studied, or, too often, volunteer treatment groups were compared to nonvolunteer control groups or groups of unknown composition.

More recently, investigators have attempted to control for motivational factors by using matched experimental and control groups of either volunteers or conscripted subjects. Conscripted subjects are defined as subjects who are forced to enroll without inquiry into their willingness to enroll. Although these practices constitute somewhat of an improvement in experimental design over former studies, they do not address the central issue. First, working exclusively with volunteers tells us nothing about the nonvolunteer and his behavior in the same situation. Second, conscripted samples give rise to

confusion over what proportion of volunteers or nonvolunteers would have been identified in the sample if they had been given a choice, remembering that the subjects are potentially a mixed group of those who might have volunteered and those who might have refused. Again, it is difficult to say what part the nonvolunteer played in the final analysis.

To summarize, numerous studies of compensatory programs, some with community college population, have failed to take into account the volunteer variable or have used sampling or recruitment techniques that have either obscured or confounded the real composition of the study groups (Kilby, 1945; Robinson, 1950; Mouly, 1952; Smith and Wood, 1955; Reed, 1956; Gregory, 1966; Roth, Mauksch, and Reiser, 1967; Keetz, 1968; Stordahl, 1969; Miller, Antenen, and Duncan, 1971). Few, if any, studies have focused specifically on the relationship of volunteer status and the effects of the compensatory programs under investigation. None of the studies reviewed attempted to identify the nonvolunteers in order to analyze their performance in a required program. The question of whether nonvolunteers can be coerced to enroll in compensatory programs and benefit from them remains largely unanswered, and the issue of debate is unresolved. Nonetheless, we persist in our practices of compulsory or voluntary enrollment with some <u>a priori</u> assumption that we are correct.

SUMMARY

Community colleges enroll a large number of high risk students, most of whom are either invited or required to enroll in compensatory education programs or services. When we invite students to participate, many students in need of the services refuse them. Since research tells us volunteering is a nonrandom event, there is a distinct possibility that some systematic factors are influencing the volunteering process. For the most part, we are unaware

of what the systematic factors are, and, more importantly, we are not entirely sure of what happens to the nonvolunteers, those students who choose not to accept the invitation.

On the other hand, we often require enrollment with the assumption we know what the students need to succeed. Again, however, few researchers have pursued the important question, does the nonvolunteer who is coerced into a program or service benefit from his or her participation?

Convincing arguments can be made for both voluntary and compulsory enrollment practices; however, as we have seen, little empirical evidence supports the use of one practice over the other. If anything, the research suggests both enrollment practices should be subjected to very close scrutiny.

What is needed is a thorough and sound investigation of the volunteer variable which will either confirm or call into question our practices. As Rosenthal (1965) suggested, what is needed is a series of investigations involving, in this case, compensatory programs for which volunteers are solicited but both volunteers and nonvolunteers are enrolled. From such studies estimates can be made of the effects on the data of initial volunteering and nonvolunteering. Matched control groups of volunteers and nonvolunteers are also essential to completely examine this issue.

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